

**Secretary-General's address to Durban Review Conference
Geneva, Switzerland, 20 April 2009**

Excellencies,

Distinguished Heads of State and Government,

President of the Human Rights Council,

High Commissioner for Human Rights,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to be with you today and to open the Durban Review Conference.

There comes a time in the affairs of humankind when we must stand firm on the fundamental principles that bind us.

There comes a time to re-affirm our faith in fundamental human rights and the dignity and worth of us all.

A time to give the virtues of tolerance and respect for diversity their fullest due and look beyond a past that divides us toward a future that unites us.

That time is now, ladies and gentlemen.

That time is now.

I looked forward to arriving here in Geneva as the promise of a new day, a move in a new direction, all nations together as one.

I looked forward to thanking the many delegations, including the chair of the PrepCom and the Facilitator of the Inter-Sessional Working Group, High Commissioner Pillay and other senior UN officials, for working so tirelessly to bring us to this point.

And indeed, I am profoundly grateful to you.

Yet I am also profoundly disappointed.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We face immense challenges in these difficult times, on many fronts.

Among the most pressing is the issue before us today: the fight against racism and all forms of racial discrimination.

Despite decades of advocacy, despite the efforts of many groups and many nations, despite ample evidence of racism's terrible toll, racism persists.

No society is immune, large or small, rich or poor.

That is why the eyes of the world, especially the eyes of victims, are upon us today.

And what are they to conclude?

We dream of moving in a new direction, yet too many of us cling to the past.

We speak of finding a new unity, as the times demand. Yet we remain weak and divided and stuck in old ways.

We speak of tolerance and mutual respect, but we point fingers and deliver many of the same accusations today that we did years if not decades ago.

Some nations, who by rights should be helping to forge a path to a better future, are not here.

Outside these halls, interest groups of many political and ideological stripes shout against one another in acrimony.

They too should be with us, talking.

All of us gathered here today welcome the dawning era of a new multilateralism ? less confrontation and more dialogue, less ideology and more common understanding.

If ever there were such a moment, it is now.

If ever there were a cause in which we can all believe, this is it ? a truly great and noble cause that binds as human beings.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Durban Declaration, and the program of action before us, commits the international community to work together to combat racism in all its manifestations.

Racism is a denial of human rights, pure and simple.

It may be institutionalized, as the Holocaust will always remind us.

Alternately, it may express itself less formally as the hatred of a particular people or a class ? as anti-Semitism, for example, or the newer "Islamophobia."

We see such intolerance in national histories that deny the identity of others, or that reject rightful grievances of minorities who might not share a so-called "official history."

We see it emerging in new forms such as human trafficking, whose victims tend to be women and children of low socio-economic status.

Refugees, asylum-seekers, migrant workers and undocumented immigrants are increasingly being stigmatized if not persecuted.

A new politics of xenophobia is on the rise.

New technologies proliferate hate-speech.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Discrimination does not go away by itself. It must be challenged.

Otherwise it can become a cause of social unrest and violence.

We must be especially vigilant during this time of economic trouble.

I fear that today's economic crisis, if not handled properly, could evolve into a full-scale political crisis marked by social unrest, weakened governments and angry publics who have lost faith in their leaders and their own future.

In such circumstances, the consequences for communities already victimized by prejudice or exclusion could be frightening indeed.

That is why I have mobilized the United Nations on the range of crises confronting us.

I have appealed to Member States to do more to combat poverty and advance the Millennium Development Goals.

The linkages between poverty, underdevelopment and discrimination are clear.

This Review Conference is an opportunity to strengthen our resolve and refocus our common efforts.

I am encouraged that the Preparatory Committee reached agreement, and I commend the flexibility and effort of all delegations to find common ground despite considerable difficulties.

The document before you is carefully balanced.

It addresses key issues.

It sets the stage for concrete action in a global campaign for justice for victims of racism worldwide.

I deeply regret that some have chosen to stand aside.

I hope they will not do so for long.

Like Theodore Roosevelt, among others, my allegiance and sympathies have always been with the men and women in the arena, struggling with courage and determination to win the day.

It may be easier to criticize those efforts from afar, but it does not advance the universal cause.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

We need you.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights holds all human beings to be created equal, born free and endowed with inalienable human rights.

All here are signatories and are duty-bound to do their utmost to defend its principles, and mark my words: they are very much at stake in this hall today.

Yes, we have come a long way in our efforts to produce a consensual text of common meaning and common commitment for all nations.

Yes, it is regrettable that, for some, we have come up short.

Yet we can overcome these lingering differences.

I therefore appeal to all countries to see this as the beginning of a process rather than an end.

Unless they participate, their views cannot be heard or accounted for.

Humanity's long march in our campaign against racism has never been easy. How could we think it would be easier going forward?

We need to build on the progress we have made and grow beyond the divisions that prevent us from moving ahead.

Let us recognize the difference between honest disagreement and mere divisiveness ? or worse, sheer obstructionism.

Let us lead by example, knowing that our own reputations are at stake.

Ladies and gentlemen,

If tolerance and respect for diversity is our goal, are we not best served by practicing those very qualities, here and now, as we work toward that goal?

We can, and must, rise to this supreme occasion.

In that spirit, I wish you a successful Review Conference.

Thank you.

